

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An optical element including: an alignment substrate;  
a liquid crystal layer formed on the alignment substrate,  
made by forming and curing a film of a liquid crystalline  
5 material; and a protective layer having high hardness, formed  
on the liquid crystal layer. The protective layer is for  
protecting the liquid crystal layer from being deformed by  
externally exerted forces. Preferably, the protective layer  
has a modulus of elasticity (= (elastic deformation) / (total  
10 deformation)) of 0.6 or more and a plastic deformation of  
0.5  $\mu\text{m}$  or less as determined by pushing an indenter into the  
protective layer with a test force of 2 mN in accordance with  
the universal hardness test method. The optical element has  
the advantages that the film thickness distribution of the  
15 liquid crystal layer remains uniform even when forces are  
externally exerted to the optical element in the process of  
production of the optical element or in the course of  
incorporation of the optical element in a liquid crystal  
display, and that the optical element can maintain its high  
20 displaying quality even when incorporated in a liquid crystal  
display.